



California's Golden Opportunity

Learning is the Work

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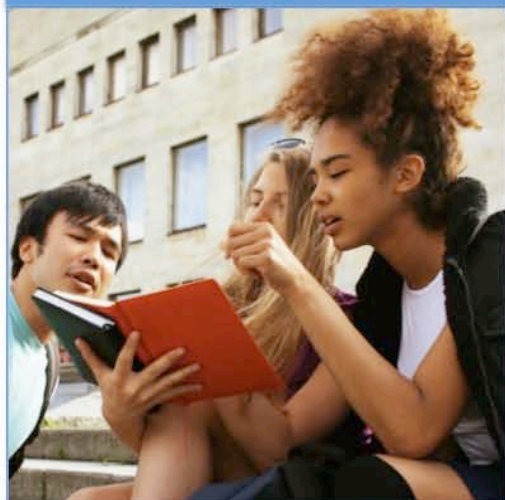


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Executive Summary

Six years ago, California set out to adopt an ambitious set of reforms aimed at redefining the operation of its schools, districts, and the education system as a whole. The goal was to achieve greater equity and excellence across the system. At this time, we can conclude that the foundational levers in play are sound. There is broad agreement about the nature of the reform called the *California Way*.

Despite some progress the main question remains: will the reform translate into substantively improved learning for all children and youth across the State? For this report we conducted interviews and focus groups with some 90 leaders and staff from key education agencies in California, 5 County Offices of Education, and 13 Districts. We collected and reviewed key documents and studies on the status of education in California.

PROGRESS AND PITFALLS TO DATE

Over the past five years California has redefined: 1) what its students should learn, 2) how to measure progress, and 3) how to fund its school system. There are early signs of improved student outcomes, and recent evidence suggests a positive relationship between LCFF and improved student outcomes. There is widespread support behind these changes. Other important recent developments include:

- a) The launch and continuous enhancement of the **California School Dashboard**, an online tool that reports the status and progress of schools and districts.
- b) The initial development of a **Statewide System of Support** designed to build the capacity of the education system to support the continuous improvement of districts.
- c) The **approval of California's ESSA plan**, which seeks to reduce duplication of effort and to leverage federal requirements to advance the *California Way*.
- d) The **enhanced coordination and continued transition in the organizational cultures of intermediary agencies** (CDE, CCEE, and Counties)—away from compliance and towards capacity building, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

THE GAP BETWEEN GETTING READY AND HAVING IMPACT

Impressive as all this is, most of the activity seems to be in the category of *getting ready or poised* to do something with impact. When looked at from the perspective of impact on teacher practice and student learning, the picture is less encouraging. Additionally, certain key issues remain to be addressed:

Underfunding. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was a much-needed step in redefining funding and decision-making in California districts. But this additional funding is not enough: 32% extra funding is needed to adequately fund California schools.

Scatter and Clutter. In the coming years the number of districts identified for differentiated assistance, and the areas where they will require support might increase at a faster pace than the system can respond. This creates the risk of scatter. Eight state priorities are too many. Adopting multiple measures and reporting results by student group were important steps, but the accumulation of new constituents for each state priority can create incoherence and confusion. To add to the clutter, a long series of federal and state requests—almost one per month—are arriving at districts without prior notice, demanding significant investment of time and effort. The LCAP template has been modified over the past few years to simplify it, yet it is still far from being simple, agile, and usable as a strategic plan.

The recently designed Statewide System of Support further heightens the problem of complicatedness. It includes 58 counties, a number of county leads, resource leads and initiatives, a new regional structure that co-exists with an existing 11-region structure that has historically grouped counties differently, CCEE and a CDE with new leaders. Furthermore, learning support systems such as Early Education and expanded learning are yet to be integrated in the System of Support.

Capacity Building. Shortly after the launch of LCFF, it became evident that many districts did not know how to effectively leverage their additional funding and their newly acquired flexibility and autonomy to improve performance—only a handful took full advantage of LCFF. There is still wide variation in capacity among county offices of education (COEs) to effectively support districts, and the existing capacity of intermediary agencies (CDE, CCEE, and COEs) has also been limited: an understaffed CDE, a small CCEE, and counties that have historically served as vehicles for compliance rather than support and capacity building are all having to adjust.

CCEE's Role, Still Unclear for Many Districts and Counties. Over its first three years, CCEE provided professional development to districts, counties, and charter schools on how to use the Dashboard and LCAPs as tools for continuous improvement. More recently, CCEE has played an active role in the design and development of the Statewide System of Support. Still the crucial question is: what is the best possible strategic role(s) that CCEE can play—as a small, agile, and somewhat external agency—to build coherence capacity for continuous improvement across the entire state?

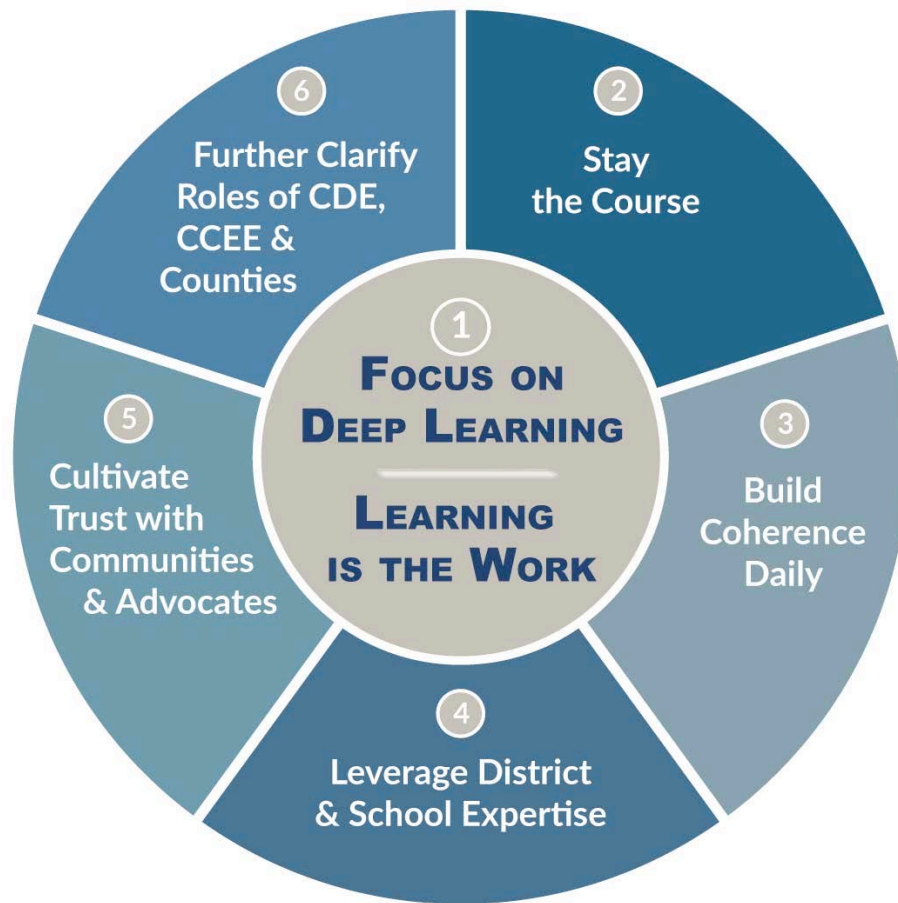
Reverting Back to Compliance. In any organization going through major changes, there is always a latent risk of people reverting back to the old ways of doing the work. Some instances of reverting back to compliance in California include: the requirement-heavy LCAP submission process, the rollout of some statewide strategies (e.g., the Geo Leads structure) without consultation with key intermediary agencies responsible to make them work; and the multiple federal and state requests that pile up on the desks of district superintendents.

Recommendations

California has come a long way, and with a majority of districts, schools and other key stakeholders now on board with the California Way there is great promise for achieving significant system change. With this in mind we have six interrelated recommendations (Figure 1).

- 1. Focus on Deep Learning: Learning is the Work.** Placing the focus of the entire system on deeper student learning and the teaching and leadership practices that nurture it is the most direct and effective way to realize the California Way. This is at the heart of success, and that is why we have placed this recommendation in the center of the diagram. It is a demanding recommendation and involves changing the culture of schools and districts. Focus on Deep Learning: Learning is the Work includes the finding that seemingly obvious solutions like increased professional learning in workshops, or new teaching standards are unlikely to change school cultures. The latter requires focused leadership at the school and district levels that enables collaborative work within and across schools.

FIGURE 1. SIX RECOMMENDATIONS



2. **Stay the Course.** It will be important to take the time to enable the policy changes of the past few years to settle in the K-12 system and make their way into classrooms and schools. Staying the course requires:
 - A. *Prioritizing Early-Childhood Education and Integrating Education Services;*
 - B. *Increasing funding strategically;*
 - C. *Keeping and strengthening the focus on equity, student learning and wellbeing;*
 - D. *Continuing and deepening the coordination and communication among key state agencies; and*
 - E. *Supporting the development of effective collaboration between districts and unions.*
3. **Build Coherence on a Daily Basis.** ‘Coherence-making’ needs to be a conscious critical preoccupation of all leaders. System change is inherently complex, and we have seen that California’s reforms generate complicatedness on a continuous basis. At the state level, coherence-making requires that SBE and CDE fully embrace the notion that coherence needs to occur on the receiving end (districts and schools), not just on the delivery end (in policy documents and intermediary agencies). We recommend that the SBE create a running list of the nature and timing

of the state and federal requests being placed on districts, to reduce distractors as much as possible, and to thoughtfully design rollout strategies to minimize clutter.

4. ***Develop and Leverage the Expertise of Schools, Districts, Counties, and Support Providers.*** When it comes to developing capacity for continuous improvement across California, high performing and continuously improving districts representing a wide spectrum in terms of size, context, and composition of the communities and students they serve are an underutilized source of expertise. The full report contains several recommendations for leveraging existing district capacity. The County Leads strategy will require significant effort on the part of County Leads, CCEE and CDE. The key to success lies in maintaining constant and focused interaction and collaboration among County Leads, transparency of results, well-established cycles of continuous improvement, and strategic support, coaching and feedback. Finally, California should identify, learn from, spread and infuse into the system key lessons from those external support providers with a track record of success on developing the capacity of districts to improve teaching and learning.
5. ***Cultivate Trust and Collective Efficacy with Communities and Advocacy Groups.*** Building trust between the education sector and advocacy groups requires the development of processes of continuous community engagement that extend beyond the LCAP budgeting and planning process. This could involve the creation of partnerships with multiple agencies to alleviate some of the out-of-school conditions that most affect student learning and engagement, as well as partnerships with universities, workplaces and public offices to provide students with access to opportunities to learn directly from experts in the fields that require attention.
6. ***Continue to clarify the role of and enhance interaction and joint work among Counties, CCEE, and CDE.*** Collaboration and communication among the SBE, the CDE, the CCEE, and CCSESA have increased over the past few years in relation to LCAP, the Dashboard, and more recently the Statewide System of Support. This type of learning-by doing collaboration has to continue. While working together, all agencies have to be alert to seeing their strategies from the perspective of their ultimate users, as well as avoiding slipping back into compliance and unilateral decision-making. Identifying the most impactful, strategic role for CCEE remains a critical area of development. The full report suggests possible strategic areas of focus for CCEE moving forward.

CONCLUSION

So far, education improvement efforts in California are much more about getting ready than about fundamentally transforming teaching and learning in classrooms and schools. The next phase—2019 and beyond—could be a watershed period for California where the work of the past six years could yield substantial benefits in a relatively short period of time. We believe that placing teaching and learning at the center of the work of all key agencies is likely to galvanize support and deepen engagement from multiple stakeholders and to unleash tremendous energy that remains untapped across the entire system.

In effect, our recommendations say: ‘stay the course but change the execution’ with a special focus on ‘Learning is the Work’.



IT'S A DAUNTING TASK

Bringing the California Way to life requires a profound cultural change in how learning occurs but California has a fighting chance.

Introduction

Six years ago, California set out to design and adopt an ambitious set of reforms aimed at redefining the operation of its schools, districts, and the education system as a whole. There began a whole system transformation designed to achieve equity and excellence for all. Under the banner of the California Way, the state took the audacious decision of leaving behind the wrong drivers of education reform (external accountability, individualistic solutions, technology and ad-hoc solutions) and adopt instead the right drivers (capacity building, collaboration, pedagogy, and systemness)—see Fullan, 2011. California made a bold commitment to equity by allocating additional funding to districts according to the number and proportion of students needing most support—English learners, students in poverty, and foster youth.

Many of the crucial pieces to establish the California Way are now in place. There are initial and encouraging (although still modest) signs of progress. And there is developing clarity about the current status of the education system in the state, the key missing pieces, and what needs improvement. Many of these ideas have been thoroughly developed and presented in comprehensive reports such as *Getting Down to Facts II* by Policy Analysis for California Education (Loeb, Edley, Imazeki, & Stipek) and *The California Way: The Golden State's Quest to Build an Equitable and Excellent Education System*, by the Learning Policy Institute (Furger, Hernández, & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

As we take stock in early 2019, California really does face a golden opportunity. Much has been done, especially in establishing the main components of the reform, building widespread support for the chosen

direction, and having in place a newly elected Governor and State Superintendent who bring fresh energy and ideas, as well as continued commitments to the California Way.

The past six years have prepared the ground for substantive transformation across California's education sector. Having the right pieces in place is very important, but it won't be enough to achieve the desired impact. Bringing the California Way to life requires a profound cultural change in how learning occurs across the system that needs to make its way into the hearts, minds and hands of a huge range of people—all the way from students and teachers to parents, community organizations, schools, districts, counties, and state agencies. More specifically, the California Way has to result in substantially enhanced teaching and deeper student learning. System-wide cultural change for high quality teaching and learning requires much more focus and effort than is often assumed, and this explains why many ambitious and well-intended reforms fall short of their expectations.

After six years, the foundational levers in play are sound. Realizing their impact is the key work that lies ahead.

While the scale of the task may appear daunting, California has a fighting chance to succeed, which relies on two key advantages of its strategy. First, it has gathered and leveraged support within the education system and across larger sectors of society. Second, the right drivers that underlie the California Way work because they fit the times (people know the old way has not been working for some time). Further, they are better suited to our human nature: they can ignite and nurture the intrinsic motivation of educators and leaders to make a palpable difference in the lives of the young people they serve. After six years, the foundational levers in play are sound. Realizing their impact is the key work that lies ahead.

The next four years offer the opportunity to continue and deepen the work, while correcting the strategy where it might be inhibiting rather than supporting enhanced focus and coherence around substantially improved teaching and learning. At the end of the first term of the current administration (2023), California will have had at least ten years of continuity in its education policy, a long enough time to make its way into classrooms, schools and across the entire system, with perhaps the promise of another four years beyond 2023.

The new Governor, Gavin Newsom, has started to outline the education priorities for California's education sector moving forward. These include a cradle-to-career plan with a strong commitment to pre-schooling and 0–5 year-old development. The new State Superintendent, Tony Thurmond favors a strong K-12 public system. And the appointment of Linda Darling-Hammond as the new President of the State Board of Education signals an intention to continue and deepen the systems change work initiated by former Governor Jerry Brown and his administration. These are all very positive signs.

Naturally, after two terms under former Governor Jerry Brown, there is a desire to take stock, refresh, and set out the specific direction for the next phase of improvement. This report is intended to feed into the new deliberations that will take place in 2019. Our core message is that substantially improved teacher practice and deeper student learning remain to be developed. Doing this can simultaneously galvanize support and ownership at multiple levels of the system, develop coherence, positively impact all state priorities, and contribute to mitigate a sense of clutter, fragmentation and overload that is starting to become evident in many districts and schools. The report is the fifth in a series of status assessments that we have been producing as critical friends to the state.¹ It follows our latest report Taking Stock: Leadership

¹ The previous status notes, in order of appearance are: 1) California's Golden Opportunity: A Status Note (Fullan, 2014); 2) The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence as a Force for Positive Change (Fullan & CA Forward, 2015); 3) LCAP's Theory of Action: Problems and Corrections (Fullan, 2015); 4) Taking Stock: Leadership from the Middle in California (Fullan & Rincón-Gallardo, 2016).

from the Middle in California, released in September 2017, in which we concluded that the direction was promising and embraced by many, but that capacity building across the many sectors was still weak. This is still the case as we analyze possible next steps. We have organized the current report in five sections: A) methodology; B) two key ideas on system-wide change; C) progress and pitfalls to date; D) the gap between getting ready and having impact; and E) recommendations for the next phase. (For acronyms, see Glossary at the end of this document.)

A. Methodology

For the past six years, we have been following the development of the education sector in California. We have played an active role supporting these developments, working with various partners throughout the state and at all levels. One of our roles, funded by the Stuart Foundation, is to monitor the evolving state of play in California's education system since the establishment of the new local funding system, organized around the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), and its associated Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP).

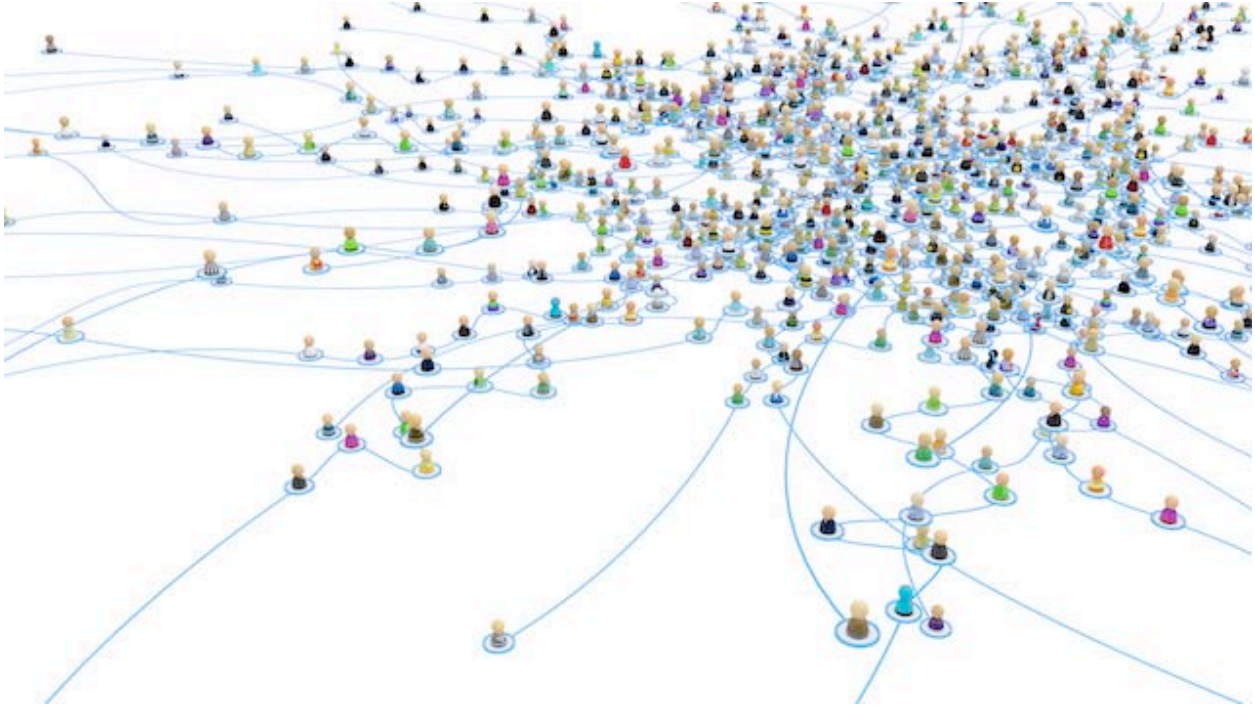
For this report we draw on interviews and focus groups with some 90 leaders and staff from key education agencies in California, including the California Department of Education (CDE), the State Board of Education (SBE), the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), the Association of California Superintendents and Administrators (ACSA), the California Teachers' Association (CTA), 5 County Offices of Education, and 13 Districts.

Most interviews and focus groups were conducted in person over four visits to California, with a few held by telephone, in the fall and winter of 2018, and in January of 2019. Interviews and focus groups were typically conducted by two members of our team. With permission from participants, all conversations were recorded in audio (for verification purposes) and through real-time notes. We visited one county office and one school district with the intention of observing and learning about the evolving role of counties in the recently launched Statewide System of Support and the role of external support providers in improving district-wide student achievement.

We collected and reviewed key documents, studies and reports on the status of education in California released over the past 18 months, including the second volume of *Getting Down to Facts* (Loeb, Edley, Imazeki, & Stipek, 2018) and the Learning Policy Institute's latest reports (Furger, Hernández, & Darling-Hammond, 2019, Podolsky, Darling-Hammond, Doss, & Reardon, 2019). We also examined the major newsletters reporting on the status of the evolution of LCFF and related policies, including EdWeek, EdSource, and CalMatters.

All these sources of information were analyzed with the intention of eliciting:

- 1) how California's improvement efforts are seen and experienced by leaders at different levels of the system;
- 2) key signs of progress; and
- 3) gaps between intentions and the realities of implementation.



CLARITY OF PURPOSE

The big problem in complex systems is how to achieve a degree of coherence on the part of those working and learning within the system.

B. Two Key Ideas on System Change: Coherence and Simplicity

We have worked inside system improvement especially since 2003. At the state system level this includes Ontario, Canada (2003-2017), Victoria, Australia (since 2014), and California (2013-present). Within these and other systems we have worked in numerous school districts ranging in size from a handful of schools to 600. We already referred to the 'wrong drivers' (policies that don't produce their intended results), compared to 'right drivers' (policies that do have a positive impact)—see Fullan, 2011. By and large many educators in California have embraced the direction of the right drivers. However, implementing the right drivers in concert has yet to be accomplished on any scale.

There are two other key, interrelated concepts that have underpinned our work since 2011: *Coherence* and *Simplicity*. The big problem in complex systems is how to achieve a degree of coherence *on the part of those working and learning within the system*. Said differently, clarity of purpose and action have to occur on the receiving end of implementation (districts and schools), not only on the delivery end of policy design. Most

systems try to get 'alignment' right: vision, goals, strategic plan, finances, assessment and so on. It is a truism that leaders almost always think that there are fewer initiatives than do followers. A sense of overload and a never-ending stream of new initiatives becomes the common experience for local implementers. Of course, reducing the sheer number of projects is a good idea, but there is a different and we think much better way to mitigate the problem of overload, namely to think in terms of 'coherence'.

The book *Coherence* (Fullan & Quinn, 2015) is based on our work with school districts, many of them in California. We define coherence as "the shared depth of understanding about the nature of the work". Coherence is evident when people in the system, all the way from classrooms to the central office, can articulate with clarity and consistency the key priorities of the system, the strategy to get there and most importantly, how their everyday work links and contributes to the overall direction and strategy. People have to work with the ideas, individually and with others before new practices become meaningful and stick. You don't 'get' coherence, you 'experience' it. Put another way: alignment is rational, coherence is emotional. It is this basic idea that leads us to design implementation strategies that are based on people *interacting* around a common focus and purpose. Leaders must enable and participate in such interaction for progress to happen.

The most successful strategies are grounded in a sound, shared, and continuously evolving understanding of how and under what conditions people in the system can learn to do their work differently.

The most successful strategies are grounded in a sound, shared, and continuously evolving understanding of how and under what conditions people in the system can learn to do their work differently. This understanding shapes and is infused in the key actions undertaken by education agencies to support the work of classrooms, schools, and districts. It is for this reason that we tend to stress *change in culture*, not just change in structure and roles. Culture in a sense is what happens between workshops — it concerns the day-to-day interactions of those implementing change.

This brings us to *simplicity*. Simplicity is not a real word, but it is a real concept. It acknowledges that system change has many parts (the complexity aspect), but that the problem has to be boiled down to the smallest number of key components and their synergy (the simplicity part). If leaders address a big problem with a rational mindset, they will err on the side of making things more complicated (Morieux & Tollman, 2014). We do suggest that leaders try and reduce the sheer number of elements and strategies that are employed. But more practically, we recommend that leaders go about implementation with a heightened awareness of the problem of 'complicatedness', which occurs when there are so many roles, structures, and initiatives that most implementers become confused.

To achieve simplicity, system leaders have to look at and develop strategy from the perspective of its ultimate users, and think explicitly about how to focus on *integrating actions* that link things together in the minds and hearts of people across the system. One of the most direct and effective ways to achieve this is by placing deeper student learning and the development of the teaching and leadership skills that produce it at the center of the education agenda. With deep learning as the core focus of the work at all levels of the system, leadership can be defined as highlighting interaction and integration, not just doing one's narrow job. We will see shortly how very complicated the new emerging structures are already becoming. For now, we highlight the problem by giving it a label: "striving for complexity and achieving clutter."



THE RIGHT DIRECTION

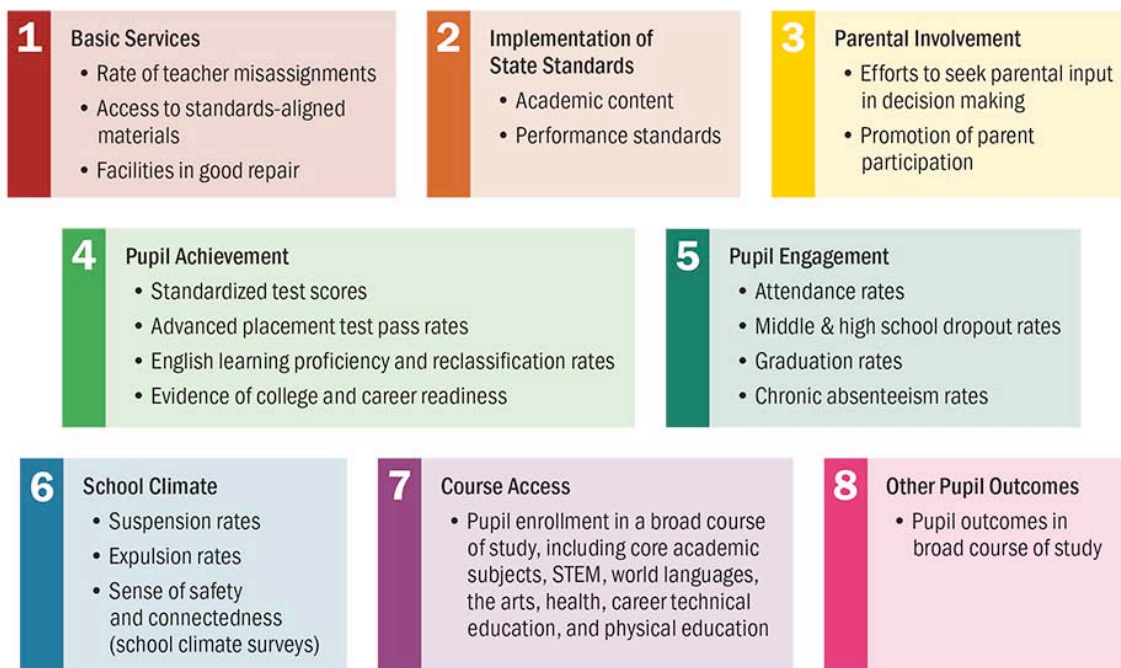
The rate of improvement in student achievement for California students in the state is greater and more equally distributed than in the rest of the country (Brighthouse et al, 2018).

C. Progress and Pitfalls to Date

Over the past five years, California has redefined: 1) what its students should learn, 2) how to measure progress, and 3) how to fund its school system. The state has now fully adopted new and ambitious standards for college and career readiness. It has established eight state priorities (See Figure 2) and developed performance measures aligned to the priorities. California is also redesigning its accountability system in a way that considers multiple measures of progress and endeavours to develop the capacity of schools, districts, and the state as a whole to get better at their work over time. And as we noted, California fundamentally reimagined how to finance and run its education system. With its Local Control Funding Formula, the state set the foundations of an educational system that:

- a) Provides districts with flexibility and autonomy to determine their own priorities and link their budget to such priorities;
- b) Advances equity by providing additional resources to districts serving high proportions of students living in poverty, English learners, and foster youth;
- c) Serves democracy better—LCFF requires the participation of local communities in determining core priorities and strategies with their school districts.

FIGURE 2. CALIFORNIA'S STATE PRIORITIES



Source: Furger, R., Hernández, L.E., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2019) *The California Way: The Golden State's Quest to Build an Equitable and Excellent Education System*. Stanford, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

There is widespread support behind LCFF among district superintendents—as well the key education agencies in the state—most of whom see it as a significant improvement compared to the previous funding model, which was structured mostly on categorical programs (Marsh & Koppich, 2018). While important concerns remain, such as the administrative burdens and bureaucratic complexity associated with the LCAP, and the inadequacy of base funding, there is overall agreement that the state is headed in the right direction.

The fundamental shifts brought about since the launching of LCFF have been followed by early signs of improved outcomes, which include: increased student achievement in some districts, reduced suspension rates, declines in exclusionary discipline, and increased adoption of social-emotional learning and restorative practices, with closing equity gaps; higher graduation rates with gaps partially closing; large increases in eligibility for access to the University of California and California State University; and significant increases in grade 8 reading since 2010, with California having one of the highest rates of increase nationally.

The rate of improvement in student achievement for California students in the state is greater and more equally distributed than in the rest of the country (Brighthouse et al, 2018) There is now available evidence that the differences in student achievement between California and the rest of the country begin before children start kindergarten. Once they enter school, students in California never catch up with the rest of the nation (Brighthouse et al, 2018). This important finding has highlighted the crucial role that early childhood

There is widespread support behind LCFF among district superintendents—as well the key education agencies in the state—most of whom see it as a significant improvement compared to the previous funding model.

education can play in levelling the playing field for children across the state, and is now being acted on by Governor Gavin Newsom and his administration.

Furthermore, recent evidence suggests a positive relationship between LCFF and improved student outcomes. The most recent study on the effects of LCFF on district spending and student achievement (Johnson & Tanner, 2018) reports that the increases in revenue and the greater flexibility in its use afforded by LCFF led to significant reductions in the average student to teacher ratio in schools, as well as to significant increases in average teacher salaries and instructional expenditures. Furthermore, the study found that “LCFF-induced increases in school spending led to significant increases in high school graduation rates and academic achievement, particularly among poor and minority students.” (p.1).² In their recent analysis of district performance over the past three years, Podolsky, Darling-Hammond, Doss, & Reardon (2019) estimate that in about one third of districts, identified as positive outliers, students of color as well as their white counterparts consistently achieve at higher than expected levels. They suggest that these districts have been able to leverage California’s new standards, funding, and accountability systems to support young people to meet more rigorous academic standards.

Other important recent developments include:

- a) The launch and continuous enhancement of the school California School Dashboard;
- b) The development of initial strategies to build the capacity of the education system to support the continuous improvement of districts (Statewide System of Support) and counties (County Leads and Geo-Leads);
- c) The approval of California’s ESSA plan, which represents a deliberate attempt to leverage federal requirements in the service of the California Way;
- d) The continued transition in the organizational cultures of intermediary agencies (CDE, CCEE, and counties) away from compliance and towards capacity building, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

Dashboard. The release of school and district outcomes via the Dashboard on November 2017 triggered a strong sense of urgency among key education agencies in California (CDE, CCEE, counties, and districts) to foster continuous improvement across the system.

With the incorporation of a multiple-measure accountability system, the Dashboard was created as an online tool for educators, school, district leaders, and the public at large to see the status and progress of schools and districts with regards to performance in the indicators included in California’s school accountability system. It provides data linked to the eight state priorities under LCFF (see Figure 2 above). Data are available for overall performance and across subgroups of students, according to race/ethnicity, identification as English learner, disability status, socio-economic disadvantage, and status as foster or homeless youth). The Dashboard is organized in a five-by-five colored grid that provides a visual representation of how specific schools and districts are performing and progressing according to state indicators for which data is available statewide. The grid indicates overall levels of performance (from very low to very high) and the extent to which indicators have changed over time (from “declined significantly” to “increased significantly”).

² The authors of the report estimated that: a) A \$1000 increase in district per-pupil spending experienced in grades 10-12 is associated with an increase of almost 6 percentage points in high school graduation rates on average; b) among poor children, a \$1000 increase in per-pupil spending experienced in grades 8-11 is associated with increases in student achievement equivalent to about seven months of learning in math and three months of learning in reading in 11th grade.

First launched on November 2017 and with a 2.0 version released in the Winter of 2018, the Dashboard is a work in progress. Its timeliness, ease of use, and the clarity and succinctness of its indicators has improved and is expected to continue to improve as further adjustments are made. (An important feature of the Dashboard is its design as an open-ended tool expected to be continuously improved and refined in a dynamic way over time). Currently, the Dashboard gets mixed reviews from district superintendents. On the one hand, many believe that it measures progress toward the LCFF goals, that it is easy to understand, and that it captures the most important measures of performance. On the other hand, less than 30% of superintendents think that it provides timely information on student outcomes (Marsh & Koppich, 2018).

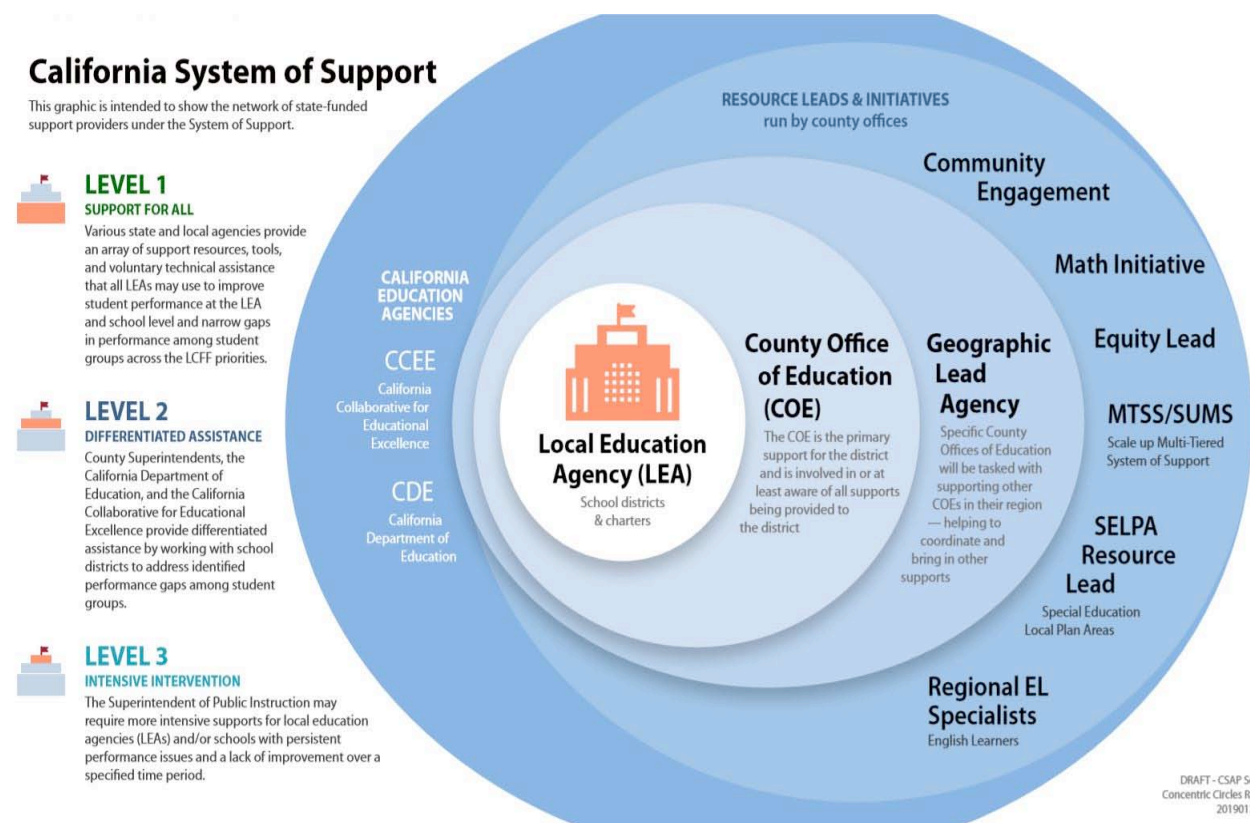
Statewide System of Support. The most prominent joint effort of the State Board of SBE, CDE, CCEE and counties over the past year has been the development and deployment of a Statewide System of Support created with the intention of developing capacity for continuous improvement in school districts across the state. The System of Support is organized in three levels. Level 1 represents the support to be made available to all districts. Level 2 is about support to districts identified through the Dashboard as in need of differentiated assistance.³ Level 3 represents the support to a smaller number of chronically underperforming districts. The bulk of the effort so far has been on defining and delivering Level 2 support. The nature of support to be offered at Levels 1 and 3 is still underspecified. Defining the nature and process of the range of support for continuous improvement to be made available to all districts across the state is an important next step to develop statewide capacity to bring the California Way to life across the system (Massengale, Knudson, & O'Day, 2018).

An important step in the development of the System of Support is the identification and selection of *Geographic Lead Agencies* (composed of nine County Offices of Education covering seven geographic areas), and a number of *Resource Leads* and *Agencies/Initiatives* to be deployed in order to support the development of capacity for continuous improvement in districts and counties (See Figure 3). Resource Leads are organized by the following areas of expertise: Special Education (seven in total: a consortium of three System Improvement Leads and four Content Leads), Community Engagement, Equity. Additional initiatives and agencies in the System of Support include the Multi-Tiered System of Support, and Title III English Language Specialists. The idea is to develop in these leads and agencies/initiatives sources of expertise and peer-support. The goal is to enhance the capacity of County Offices of Education to effectively support districts. Under this 'Leads' structure, every county will be connected to at least one county lead. In the most current definition of their roles, Geo-Leads will: a) help build capacity of other counties and districts in their areas of expertise; b) broker and connect the counties and districts they serve with additional sources of support and expertise that fit their needs; and c) act as 'hubs' for convening and providing information and resources to the counties in their geographic region.

Another key aspect of the work over the past 18 months has been an effort to integrate Special Education (historically siloed and running in parallel to general education) into the overall education improvement agenda across the state (2 out of every 3 of the over 220 districts identified as needing differentiated assistance in the Fall of 2017 showed underperformance of students with disabilities). Special education support in California is delivered through Special Education Local Planning Areas (SELPA's). There are a few SELPA's, including the one housed at El Dorado County, that have made important progress in integrating Special Education and regular education services, in alignment with the recommendations of the 2015 Task Force on Special Education. However, in general, a lot of work remains to be done to ensure that Special Education operates from a strong foundation of inclusion across the state.

³ A district is identified for differentiated assistance if at least one student subgroup received the lowest color rating (red, which indicates either very low performance or low performance and significant decline compared to the previous year) in two or more of six achievement metrics.

FIGURE 3. CALIFORNIA STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT



Source: California Department of Education (2018) California System of Support.

ESSA Plan. States are required to create and get approval of their ESSA plan in order to access federal funding for education. California's ESSA plan was created with the deliberate intention of leveraging federal requirements in the service of the California Way. The plan seeks to integrate ESSA and LCFF planning to reduce duplication of effort. Three key elements of California's ESSA plan align with and advance the California Way. First, the plan includes the use of the California School Dashboard and its multiple measures system to assess progress, a significant departure from the single-measure approach that preceded it. Second, it relies on districts, not the state, to make improvement decisions, an approach that is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity underlying the LCFF. And third, it moves away from sanctions and instead endeavours to create a system of county and state supports for continuous improvement. All these are important developments (although, as we will discuss in the next section, a lot of work remains to be done to ensure that these decisions translate into focused action for improved teaching and learning and coherence across the system).

Shifting mindsets and organizational culture in intermediary agencies. There is also a shared sense of urgency and commitment to *shift how intermediary agencies operate* internally, in coordination with other agencies, and in relation to districts. There has been work underway in all these areas, as briefly discussed below.

- Intentional and constant communication and joint work between intermediary agencies. Key state agencies, including CDE, CCEE, CCSESA, and individual counties have increased their communication and interactions with each other, both formally through multi-agency committees and informally to share information and problem-shoot. One of the most prominent examples was the creation a multi-agency working group tasked with redesigning the Statewide System of Support. The group had representation of the four major state education agencies (SBE, CDE, CCEE, and CCSESA) along with county and district representatives, as well as a variety of state level associations and advocacy groups. The multi-agency group as a whole met every two months and was organized in subwork groups—each with representation from all agencies involved—that focused on specific aspects of the System of Support under development (e.g., intensive support to chronically underperforming districts, identifying bright spots, communications, implementation, etc.).⁴ Another example of coordination between intermediary agencies is the constant communication and coordination that the California Department of Education has maintained with the State Board of Education (with tight communication between staff of both agencies) and the legislature (through CDE’s Office of Government Affairs), which has kept all three parts in the know, from early on, about core issues to be resolved. The CCEE has partnered with counties, non-profit organizations and professional associations to co-design and co-facilitate training modules or professional learning networks for schools and districts to learn how to use the Dashboard and the LCAP as tools for continuous improvement.
- Internal interaction and coordination within CDE. A theme that repeats consistently across our interviews with leaders and staff in the California Department of Education is how frequently departments and units interact with each other—formally and informally—to design shared solutions, coordinate efforts, and keep each other in the know. Some directors also talked about their constant coordination and communication with stakeholders outside CDE, such as the Parents’ Association, advocacy groups, etc. to do things such as testing out an initial idea or product (e.g., format of student scores reports), gather input, and refine them or entirely toss them out.
- Shifts in the nature of the relationship between CDE and counties. In our conversations with senior leaders in a number of counties and school districts we heard comments about the significant shifts they are observing in how CDE interacts with them—with a much more collaborative and co-determination tone than before. For example, CDE staff brings to counties ideas that are being developed to gather their feedback and reactions from early on—and uses such feedback to refine, modify, or simply toss out ideas deemed unviable from the perspective of county leaders. The modifications to the LCAP template and the Dashboard are, to some extent, result of feedback CDE has gathered from state agencies and other stakeholders. We also heard about instances of miscommunication and poor coordination (e.g., with regards to the decision and strategy to create Geo-Leads, which we discuss in more detail later). This being said, there is an overall sense that the communication and coordination that CDE was establishing with counties toward the end of 2018 was stronger than it was before.
- Transition of counties into supporters of and collaborators with districts. At the state level, there is clear agreement about the crucial role counties will have in moving California’s education forward—this acknowledgement is much stronger now than it was even a year ago. Some markers of the importance given to counties and the need to develop their capacity as effective supporters of

⁴ After the Lead Agencies were identified, the multi-agency work transitioned to quarterly in-person meetings with representatives from all Lead Agencies. Various Lead Agencies meet on their own as well.

districts include: a) The selection of a former county superintendent as the new executive director of the CCEE; b) the participation of county representatives in statewide working groups and committees; c) the recent effort to identify and select county leads as a key piece of the Statewide System of Support; and d) the significant investment that CCSESA has made to offer all counties training on continuous improvement by the Carnegie Foundation.

Almost everyone we talked to mentioned how crucial it was to have the Governor, the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SSPI) on the same page with respect to California's education agenda. Throughout his administration, former Governor Jerry Brown effectively and actively kept the legislature from bombarding the education sector with new initiatives and programs. We heard frequently from our interviewees that this was one of Brown's most powerful and effective ways of emphasizing education priorities and protecting those implementing them. Also, for the first time, the State Board was given leeway to figure out how to rollout LCFF (with the legislature creating the overall framework within which to operate, but without giving the board detailed instructions on how to proceed). The board and CDE maintained active and ongoing communication to keep everyone in the know from early on and avoid surprises. The sense of shared direction among Governor, board, and SSPI contributed to creating an atmosphere where leaders and staff could focus on their crucial work. Overall agreement between the teachers' unions and the state education agencies (e.g., the heads of CTA and ACSA leading the creation of a plan for continuous improvement) on the California Way was also key to creating stability and trust across the system.

The California Way has garnered broad support and momentum among education agencies and in other sectors of society. This is remarkable given the massive size and sheer complexity of the state's education system. It is important to recognize that behind the California Way is a decade-long, active involvement of multiple actors and organizations, including students and parents from historically marginalized communities, advocacy groups, teacher unions, district leaders, philanthropists, business leaders, academics, and policy makers (Furger, Hernández, & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This signals an important hidden advantage that we believe should be cultivated and intentionally leveraged to lead California's education into the future. If you want to make an idea or strategy work in an education system as massive and complex as California's, you *have to* coordinate and interact constantly with a wide range of agencies and stakeholders. This is a never-ending proposition given the number of components, and changeover of personnel. However, once communication and collaboration are established as continuous and necessary, policies and new practices can become more widely understood, and supported as trust is built. Such broad engagement makes the long-term sustainability of LCFF and associated improvements more likely, and will be crucial if the California Way is to survive and further grow through the recent transition in senior political leadership.



IT'S TIME TO BRIDGE THE GAP

Some advocacy groups are growing impatient about the persistence of achievement gaps among subgroups. There is a real risk that this impatience could lead to advocacy groups pushing for legislation that reverts the system back to old-school accountability measures and categorical programs.

D. The Gap Between Getting Ready and Having Impact

All of this sounds impressive and to a large extent it is. However, if we put our hard performance hats on, most of the activity seems to be in the category of *getting ready or poised* to do something with impact. When looked at from the perspective of impact in teacher practice and student learning the picture is less encouraging. California still lags behind the nation both in average student outcomes and in the equality of outcomes across student groups (Reardon et al, 2018).

Granted, as pointed out earlier, some districts are improving the performance of students of color and their white counterparts at higher than expected levels, and the State as a whole has seen some increases in student achievement and reductions in achievement gaps at a faster pace than the rest of the nation. Yet there are still large proportions of California students not meeting the state standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics (Kurlaender, Reed, Cohen, & Ballis, 2018). In 2018, for example, about half of the students in the state met or exceeded standards in ELA, whereas only two in five met or exceeded the standards in math. Large gaps in achievement persist (Edley & Kimner, 2018). Last year only 19.7% of African American students and 26.6% of Latino/Hispanic students reached or exceeded the standards in math, compared to their White and Asian counterparts (53.6% and 73.5%, respectively). In English Language

All of this sounds impressive and to a large extent it is. However, if we put our hard performance hats on, most of the activity seems to be in the category of getting ready or poised to do something with impact.

Arts, only 32.3% of African American students and 39.2% of Latino and Hispanic students met or exceeded the standards in 2018, compared to 64.9% and 76.4% of their White and Asian counterparts. Punitive discipline practices, while significantly reduced between 2009-2016, continue to affect students of color disproportionately, and reductions seem to have reached a plateau in the last two years.

The recent report from LPI on positive outliers (Podolosky, Darling-Hammond, Doss, & Reardon, 2019) introduces the opportunity for more focused debate. It shows that a number of districts have performed at a higher level in student achievement (ELA and Math) than would have been predicted based on SES. In focusing on a sample of districts with over 2000 students and with at least 200 African American or Hispanic students, and 200 white students, 156 out of the 435 districts students achieve at much higher than expected levels (p.4). The study also identified a number of districts that performed at lower levels than predicted. The explanation for the quantitative differences centered around teacher quality (credentials), finances, and generally how districts leveraged the new standards and assessments to increase student achievement of all of its subgroups. In addition to the quantitative studies LPI conducted case studies of seven named positive outlier districts, a study not yet published. The positive outliers study is a great contribution because it allows us to focus the debate. In terms of some of our key concerns in this report we would want to know:

- How sizable are the student achievement gains?
- What are the pedagogical practices behind the gains?
- What is the role of collaborative professionalism?
- What is the nature of the relationship between positive outlier districts and their schools?

Some clarification on these matters will be derived from the seven case studies (selected from across the state as higher than expected performing districts). The main conclusion of our report remains: system-wide substantive changes across the state have yet to be realized. The point is how can the work of positive outliers become the norm.

With most of the key policy pieces in place and the broad support it has garnered over the past six years, the California Way is still far from where it could be. Making intentional, strategic connections between the core state strategies and substantially improved teaching practice and deeper student learning is the crucial next step to bridge the gap between getting ready and having impact. This is in our view the most direct way to ensure that the California Way reaches the hearts, minds and hands of the vast majority of those working and learning. For this to happen, there are some key issues that require attention, which we briefly discuss below.

UNDERFUNDING

Governor Brown's term, especially the last six years, was a period of relative financial prosperity during which the K-12 education budget was substantively increased. In 2011-2012, the lowest point following the recession, the K-12 budget for California was about 42 billion, whereas the 2018-2019 budget was 70 billion (CDE, 2018; Fensterwald, 2018). Much of the increase compensated for budget cuts prior to 2012, but real gains were also made (Imazeki, 2018).

The design and launch of LCFF was bold and audacious. It was a much-needed step in redefining how education is funded and how strategic decisions are made in schools and districts across California. But it is now clear that the additional funding is not enough. As many superintendents (Marsh & Koppich, 2018) and experts (Imazeki et al, 2018) have pointed out, California's base funding continues to be substantially below

the national average, and leaves many districts (especially those with low proportions of EL students, foster youth, and students living in poverty) with significantly less resources than they need to function properly. Add to this the rising operating costs (pensions, medical benefits, maintenance of facilities, etc.) that are growing at a much faster pace than the increased funding (see Koedel, C., 2018; Brunner & Vincent, 2018). The cost of pensions in particular is rising at such an accelerated pace that, with things staying the way they are, many districts may become insolvent by 2020-2021 (Krausen & Willis, 2018). The most reasonable and up-to-date calculations suggest that California would need 32% extra funding, or \$25 billion per year above the 2016-17 spending, to adequately fund its schools (Imazeki et al, 2018).

Governor Newsom's first proposed state budget includes \$3 billion dollars to help reduce districts' rising pension obligations, and promises to bring substantial financial relief to districts. The proposed budget also includes an additional \$576 million for Special Education, \$1.8 billion for early learning and the wellbeing of children ages 0-5, \$1.4 billion for Higher Education (increased enrollment, improved graduation and tuition freeze), and \$10 million to kick-start the creation of a statewide education data base linking student information all the way from early childhood education to post-secondary education and into the workforce. The total proposed K-12 education budget for 2019-20 is close to \$72 billion, a new all-time high (CDE, 2019). These are all encouraging signs, and the quest to achieve adequacy in funding for education should continue.

Problems to be resolved might be growing in number and nature at a faster pace than the system addresses and learns how to respond.

SCATTER AND CLUTTER

The Dashboard is intended to be a guide to progress, and a measure of impact with respect to the eight key state priorities. The first time around, in the Fall of 2017, the Dashboard results led to the identification of 226 districts in need of differentiated assistance, two thirds of whom were so identified because of underperformance with students with disabilities. In 2019, 374 districts were identified. Once again, about two thirds had underperformance of students with disabilities. Additionally, half of the districts on the list had low indicators with homeless students, and one-third had underperformance with students in foster care. With more indicators added in the coming years, it is to be expected that the number of districts identified for differentiated assistance, and the areas where they will require support will keep growing. This might be creating an unsustainable situation where the 'problems' to be resolved are growing in number and nature at a faster pace than the system addresses and learns how to respond to the issues identified. This increases the risk of scatter, with the System of Support shifting focus from one year to the next, depending on the new areas of underperformance identified each time.

As one district superintendent poignantly said, "If this was the dashboard in my car, I would crash every time!"

To further complicate things, eight state priorities are too many. It is true that adopting multiple measures of progress instead of a single, narrow measure was an important step. And the reporting of results on state indicators by student group has allowed California to stimulate conversation and action on racial equity. At the same time, each priority has accumulated new constituents—groups, vendors, stakeholders—pushing for different priorities, which can create incoherence and confusion while at the same time making specific priorities politically harder to remove. If too many priorities were not enough, special education suddenly became a key area of focus after the Dashboard results revealed that two thirds of the districts identified for differentiated assistance in 2017 was due to underperformance among students with disabilities.

As one district superintendent poignantly said, "If this was the dashboard in my car, I would crash every time!" The car metaphor is helpful to sketch the logic of action that could guide the education work in California going forward. When driving a car, the key to success is learning to drive well. The signs on the

dashboard can offer helpful information on how the driving is going, and how the car is working. But giving too much attention to one or two of those signs would invariably lead to crashes. To be sure, some time needs to be invested in learning to read and use the dashboard, but the bulk of the effort should be placed on “driving.” In our view, the equivalent of “driving” is the pedagogical and leadership practices that enhance and deepen student learning. Said another way: the dashboard should not be an end in itself. For most outcome measures in education there is a tendency to become pre-occupied with the end product, and fail to trace the causal pathways that may produce better outcomes. In contrast, centering the focus and effort of the system on enhanced leadership and teaching practice for better and deeper learning for all students can at the same time bring coherence to the system, improve key indicators faster, and turn the dashboard into what it should be—a device to inform the driving, not the driver itself.

The multiple requirements districts are now receiving from the state and the federal government are also adding to the clutter.

A group of superintendents we met with recently, listed the following requests they have received from the state over the current academic year—each of which requires the creation and engagement of committees, data collection and analysis, and the development of plans to respond to the questions prompted by the federal or state requests: Civil Rights Document in September 2018, Differentiated Assistance in October 2018, Lowest Performing Student Block Grant in November 2018, Differentiated Assistance and Additional Targeted Support and Impact (ATSI) in December 2018, Career and Technical Education Incentive Grant (CTEIG) in January 2019, Performance Indicator Review (PIR) in 2019. Most of these requirements arrive at the districts without previous notice, and disrupt in very important ways the operation of districts. This is what we call striving for complexity and achieving clutter.

It does seem that ad hoc requirements are representing a distraction from local focus.

It does seem that ad hoc requirements from the overall system are representing a distraction from local focus. It is not that any one of these requirements is the problem, but rather the ad hoc combination. Our question is not whether these are legitimate requests but rather how they play themselves out at the receiving end. Coherence-making is about the purposes and strategy across the system falling into place in the minds and hearts of those working and learning in the system. Instead, the experience for district leaders illustrated here seems more like the piling up of external requests into an ever-growing clutter. The adoption of the California Way is supposed to result in greater focus for districts in selecting a small number of ambitious goals and pursuing them through continuous improvements in teaching and learning. Instead, well-intended, uncoordinated requests, such as the ones just listed above, end up being so many piecemeal distractors.

LCAP is also adding to the clutter. The State Board of Education and the California Department of Education have been proactive in modifying the LCAP template over the past few years to simplify it, reduce duplication of efforts, and align the LCAP process with federal ESSA requirements for school and district

Continued effort will be required to get the LCAP to become as simple, agile and short a strategic plan as possible.

planning. Districts acknowledge that the completion and submission process have improved over time. At the same time, it is still perceived by many as a laborious process and an add-on to many other plans that counties and districts are required to complete and submit (e.g., Title I plan, single plan for student

achievement, LEA plan, Title III plan). District superintendents we talked to said how amazing it would be if all plans could be condensed into a single and simple strategic plan. By this we mean a short, agile document of a few pages, not a single, massive pile-up of subplans. This is much easier said than done given federal requirements, and we are aware that California is working on it. As recently as January 2019, the State

Board of Education approved new changes to the LCAP template to reduce duplication of efforts in completing the LCAP and to enhance its focus on school improvement. These are steps in the right direction, and continued effort will be required to get the LCAP to become as simple, agile and short a strategic plan as possible within current federal constraints.

As we consider the recently designed Statewide System of Support, we can further see the problem of complicatedness. The simplest possible version of the proposed structure of support is contained in Figure 3. In the graphic, districts are placed at the center, with their county as a single point of entry to the larger system of supports. At least in terms of design, this makes sense and can potentially help with coherence-making. But things get complicated quickly. There are over 1000 districts and over 1300 charter schools. Then there are 58 counties, 9 of which are Geo-Leads appointed to help counties within their jurisdiction to develop capacity to work with districts—how they will do this has not yet been worked out. Next, although it is not noted in the Figure, the existing structure consisting of 11 counties operating as coordination agencies for certain types of grants remains. This means that some counties will be linking to two different sets of regional county offices with no clear definition as to how these two sets of services would differ. To further complicate things, there are also Early Education and expanded learning support systems (among others) that are yet to be integrated in the System of Support. Then there are the six so-called 'subject matter resource leads and initiatives' that slice into all counties and districts in their area of expertise. How, for example, can equity be addressed across and within all these pieces? Finally, there is CCCE, whose role remains unclear to many counties and districts, and an understaffed CDE which will now have two new leaders—the Governor/State Board, and State Superintendent.

The best way forward is not 'how do we implement this amorphous complexity', but rather a) how to bring focus for the entire system; b) how to reduce the clutter currently experienced by districts; c) how do combinations of groups slice into desired aspects of the structure with an integration mindset; and d) how can this be done in a way that makes sense to educators, school leaders, district leaders, and parents.

We say again that the best way forward is not 'how do we implement this amorphous complexity', but rather: a) how to bring focus for the entire system; b) how to reduce the clutter currently experienced by districts; c) how do combinations of groups slice into desired aspects of the structure with an integration mindset; and d) how can this be done in a way that makes sense to educators, school leaders, district leaders, and parents. One way of expressing the solution is to say 'how can coherence be achieved at the receiving end, not the delivery end'. Put another way, how can districts be helped to become better 'coherence-makers' in the context of an exceedingly complex infrastructure. Indeed, our recommendations are based on focusing on local district implementation of improved teaching and learning working outwards and upwards to the system that would enable such implementation.

CAPACITY BUILDING

In our Taking Stock report (2017), we pointed out that when LCFF/LCAP was launched, there was a key assumption among its proponents that has proven wrong: that, given autonomy and resources, most districts and schools would know how to do their work better, and as a result substantially improved overall performance and equity would follow. The complementary side to this assumption was that only a small number of schools and districts would need support to improve. The proportions seem to be the exact opposite: most districts not knowing how to effectively improve their performance and only some taking full advantage of the autonomy and resources provided by LCFF.

With the most recent launch of the Dashboard results in the Winter of 2018, more than one third of districts in California were identified for differentiated assistance, with 374 districts having at least one student subgroup receiving the lowest color rating in two or more of six achievement metrics. And there is still wide variation in capacity among counties to effectively support districts. While some counties are becoming examples of focused and effective support to their districts, there are still those whose support is being perceived by some districts as missing, contrived, constraining, and/or unhelpful. CDE leaders we talked to estimate that of the 58 counties in California, 6-10 have fully embraced their new role as supporters and capacity builders (as opposed to vehicles for compliance) vis-à-vis districts. The vast majority (80-90%) are reportedly showing signs of willingness to undergo, and have already started the necessary shifts in organizational culture to better support districts. The recently created Geo-Lead structure represents a first attempt to enhance the capacity of counties as effective supporters of district improvement. But again, these are moves to get ready, not yet accomplishments.

The existing capacity of intermediary agencies (CDE, CCEE, and County Offices of Education) to effectively support districts has also been limited: an understaffed CDE, a small CCEE, and counties that have historically served as vehicles for compliance rather than support and capacity building. The problem of understaffing within CDE has now come to the surface with the release of Getting Down to Facts 2.0. The California Department of Education is down to its barebones (Moffitt et al, 2018). Relative to other state education systems across the nation, the CDE is seriously understaffed. In many ways what the CDE has been able to accomplish over the past six years is remarkable given its shortage of staff. It is even more remarkable when taking into account that over 70% of CDE staff is hired under federal funds for compliance-oriented functions. Important as this progress might be, you cannot sustain a strong education system on highly committed leaders who are spread thin and overworked.

Many education systems often underestimate the resources, time and effort that are required to build the capacity for continuous improvement across districts and schools, and that's where most well intended reform efforts fall flat.

Many education systems often underestimate the resources, time and effort that are required to build the capacity for continuous improvement across districts and schools, and that's where most well intended reform efforts fall flat. The Statewide System of Support represents the most recent strategy to design and coordinate efforts to build the capacity of districts. The related Geo-Leads strategy is intended to build the capacity of counties to effectively support districts. We believe these efforts have the right intent and vision. At the same time, a lot of work remains to be done to figure out the important details that will determine whether or not the promise of capacity building is realized in California. Here we list and discuss some of the issues that we consider most prominent.

- *Role of districts and schools.* As the main intended 'beneficiaries' of the System of Support, and because of their privileged knowledge of the students and communities they serve, districts and schools can offer crucial insights and ideas on how to turn the system of supports into an effective strategy to build their capacity for continuous improvement. Especially important will be the expertise and insights from positive outlier districts. The direct and consistent involvement of district and school representatives in the design, rollout, and assessment of the Statewide System of Supports is very important, and should be continuously pursued. To be effective, solutions must be jointly determined by counties and districts working together. The involvement of some district leaders in the multi-agency working group assisting the design for the System of Support is an encouraging initial step.

Also, there are important reservoirs of talent and expertise in districts and schools themselves, which could be tapped to support the development of capacity in districts and counties. Ontario's renowned reform strategy (2003-2018) was able to do this through secondment of district and school leaders with demonstrated capacity to turn around or continuously improve student achievement district-wide. These leaders were appointed for a limited number of years (three) to work for the Ministry of Education in providing coaching and support to other districts. (Their salaries as district leaders were maintained and the funding for their pay remained at the districts.) After their term, they went back to their districts, now with greater expertise and skill coming from having worked at the provincial level. This was a win-win proposition that simultaneously enhanced the capacity of the province and its districts. California features some of the best school districts in the nation, and throughout our continuous involvement with the state, we continue to discover lesser-known districts that are doing remarkable work. The positive outliers report from the Learning Policy Institute (Podolski, Darling-Hammond, Doss, & Reardon, 2019) has brought to the surface multiple districts that are beating the odds. In figuring out how to leverage this reservoir of talent and expertise lies one of the keys to a vibrant and effective system of support.

With a growing market of training companies, professional development organizations, consultants and the like, it is crucial to define key criteria to identify and select the support providers to be contracted by districts and counties.

- *Getting smart on external support.* With a growing market of training companies, professional development organizations, consultants and the like, it is crucial to define key criteria to identify and select the support providers to be contracted by districts and counties. Some of the most impactful and lasting forms of external support we have seen in action in California have the following defining features:
 - a) External support provider commits to improve the practice of key actors that the support is intended to influence (e.g., teachers, principals, parents);
 - b) Has a clear and sound theory on how people learn best that permeates its approach to capacity building;
 - c) Commits to ongoing coaching and support over a period of time long enough to ensure impact and internal sustainability;
 - d) Mentors and coaches district leaders to become the support providers in the longer run;
 - e) Establishes mechanisms of two-way communication with the district to identify (and clear) what gets in the way of good practice, and to tweak and refine the support strategy over time.

CCEE's ROLE, STILL UNCLEAR FOR MANY DISTRICTS AND COUNTIES

Over its first three years of operation, CCEE focused on fulfilling its legislative mandate to provide professional development to districts, counties, and charter schools on how to use the Dashboard and LCAPs as tools for continuous improvement. It did this through three major vehicles: 1) large-scale workshops and modules (the latter co-developed and co-facilitated with counties); 2) tailored local training; and 3) Professional Learning Networks (56 PLNs, with 3 or more districts and/or schools each, and PLXs, which bring together the PLN facilitators) hosted mainly by counties, but also by non-profit organizations, or professional associations.

More recently CCEE has been an active participant in in the design and development of the Statewide System of Support. Over the past six months, its role within the System of Support has become clearer and

more prominent. It includes: coordinating and facilitating the work of Lead Agencies (in partnership with CDE); providing direct technical assistance (in collaboration with county offices), to counties, districts, and charter schools; brokering expertise and knowledge for systemic change for districts; and developing resources for capacity building.

CCEE is in its fourth year of operation with a small staff. There is still little clarity among counties and districts about its role in the larger picture of California's system improvement journey, as well as about what it has accomplished or learned to date. CCEE's role within the System of Support could represent an important step in becoming a more strategic agency statewide, yet it is too early to know whether and how deep its influence will be across the state. This role will be more effective the more it serves to catalyze and sustain fundamental changes in the organizational cultures of the department of education, counties, districts, schools and classrooms, so that collaboration and continuous improvement for enhanced teaching and learning become the work of everyone in the system. The major need is to help create and sustain a culture of learning across the education system.

A crucial question is: what is, strategically, the best possible role(s) that CCEE can play—as a small, agile, and somewhat external agency—to build coherence capacity for continuous improvement across the entire state.

Recently, CCEE has been tasked with supporting a handful of chronically underperforming districts that are under fiscal distress. This new task could potentially absorb most if not all of the energy and resources. A crucial question however is: what is, strategically, the best possible role(s) that CCEE can play—as a small, agile, and somewhat external agency—to build coherence capacity for continuous improvement across the entire state?

REVERTING BACK TO COMPLIANCE

In any organization that's going through major changes, there is always a latent risk of people reverting back to the old ways of doing the work once initial impulses for change wane, or when attention is diverted away from the change efforts. This can be thought of as the tendency to slip back into one's 'cultural legacy.' Furthermore, some advocacy groups are growing impatient about the persistence of achievement gaps among subgroups. There is a real risk that this impatience could lead to advocacy groups pushing for legislation that reverts the system back to old-school accountability measures and categorical programs. We heard of multiple instances of compliance creeping back into California's education sector. We'll outline some of the most prominent examples here. We should say, however, that in a system where accountability

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requirements have been substantially lessened (as was the case in the past six years), there does need to be some form of effective accountability (see Fullan's, 2019 chapter on 'culture based accountability'). The question is not just how to tighten accountability but rather how to firm it up so that it increases results.

LCAP, bureaucratic and more rigid. In our Taking Stock report, we mentioned the cases of districts that started with a simple strategic plan of a dozen pages and ended up with an LCAP of over 300 pages. Almost every district leader we talked to referred to LCAP as a document for compliance, and a far cry from a strategic planning document—something that districts often create separately from their LCAP. The SBE and CDE have been proactive in making modifications to the LCAP based on feedback from stakeholders, including parents, advocacy groups, counties and districts. These modifications include, among others, a new requirement to include an LCFF budget overview for parents and the conversion of the LCAP into a fixed

three-year plan. This being said, further work remains to be done on the LCAP. There is still a tendency to see it as an end in itself. Districts on the move treat LCAP and related ideas as a means to go deeper into implementation.

Command-and-control striking back. As we pointed out in our previous report, and as highlighted earlier here, communication and collaboration between agencies has become much richer and more robust over the past six years. However, it is difficult to interpret what some recent changes might mean. The creation of the new County Lead structure is one example. The design of the strategy happened with little consultation with CCSESA or counties, who at the time of our interviews found themselves trying to make sense of it and figure out how to make it work. Some counties had to invest time and effort into repairing and re-establishing relationships that were strained as a result of what some of their leaders experienced as a rushed and mishandled decision-making process in establishing the Geo-leads.

The risk of reverting back to compliance is also latent within CDE. As we mentioned earlier, the department has made remarkable progress in shifting its organizational culture into one that is more internally collaborative and supportive to counties and districts. At the same time, about 70% of CDE staff is hired with federal funds. This contributes to the clutter of requests piled up on districts that we discussed earlier, and makes it difficult to fully shift into the mindsets and culture of a learning organization. The recently approved ESSA plan for California represents a very important effort to leverage federal requirements in the service of the California Way. Yet the return to compliance is something to remain alert to and discourage within CDE and in its interactions with counties and districts. In any case, developing and refining a new and coherent accountability system consistent with LCFF/LCAP should remain a priority.

Given the situation we have been describing—common agreement about direction, complexity and clutter of agencies, deep need for new capacities, a new regime that is committed to the direction, but seeks greater specific implementation, and we would say strong desire on the ground to make improvements—what recommendations might best move the system forward in the next phase?



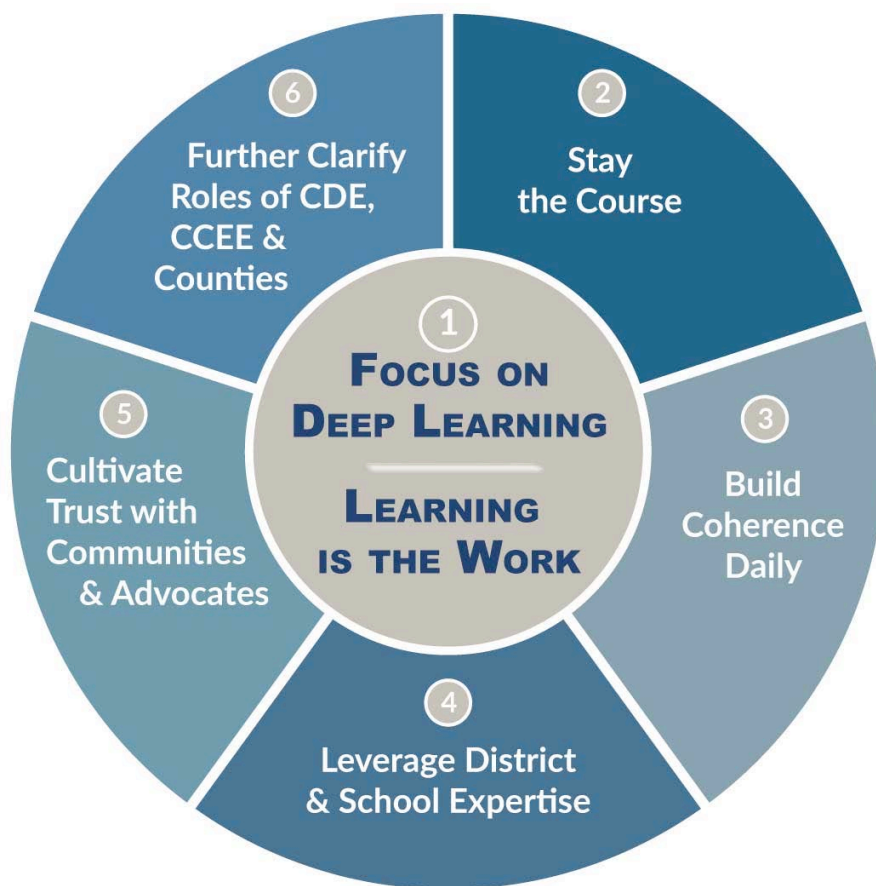
OUR RECOMMENDATION:

Stay the course but change the execution. Focus especially on 'Learning is the Work'.

E. Recommendations

In system work there is often agreement about what is wrong with the status quo. LCFF/LCAP tapped into the long period of dissatisfaction that preceded it. People rally around what is wrong because they have experienced it. The solution however is another matter. What sounds good, for example local control, can only be appreciated in the abstract because people have not experienced its nature on the ground. To put it directly, it is much easier to rally against the old system, than it is to create a new and better one. California has come a long way in building such a new system, with the difficulties that come from having no previous experience in doing this, and with a majority of districts, schools, and many other stakeholders now on board with the California there is indeed great promise for achieving significant system change. With this in mind we have six interrelated recommendations (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. SIX RECOMMENDATIONS



1. FOCUS ON DEEP LEARNING: LEARNING IS THE WORK

Placing the focus of the entire system on deeper student learning, and the teaching and leadership practices that nurture it, is the most direct and effective way to realize the California Way. This is at the heart of success, and that is why we have placed this recommendation at the center of the diagram. The other five recommendations are important, but mainly in the service of recommendation one. Any movement on the other five recommendations will not necessarily move the core of recommendation one.

Placing the focus of the entire system on deeper student learning, and the teaching and leadership practices that nurture it, is the most direct and effective way to realize the California Way.

The history of the teaching profession is founded on the isolation and autonomy of teachers. Changing this to purposeful collaboration represents a mammoth cultural and structural change. Certainly, much progress has been made on developing effective collaboration, and we have been involved in many of these efforts over the past two decades and more. But it is still the case that day-to-day, effective collaboration is not the norm. Success requires a change in the culture of interaction among teachers and those who work with them. As we said, it is what happens *in between workshops and meetings* that counts.

Improved teaching and learning has been nominally at the center of many reform efforts over the years, but it has yet to be realized on any scale. We have to conclude that the wrong and/or insufficient strategies

have been used. First, given the normative history it is likely that teachers individually and as a group have not pressed hard enough for what we have called 'learning is the work' versions of collaboration. Second, the state as we have seen tends to be insensitive to this need and ends up generating a variety of 'distractors' to the core teaching and learning agenda. Third, even strategies that look like they will help give false comfort that collaboration is being addressed. For example, professional development, professional networks, attending PLC meetings, professional standards, and the like *will not deliver* on changing culture. At best they are necessary but not sufficient to change culture. Don't get us wrong. We strongly favor professional development and networks. And especially endorse Furger, Hernández, and Darling-Hammond's (2019) priority of focusing on strengthening the educator workforce. It is just that professional learning activities by themselves are typically not close enough to daily practice to influence the ultimate change in culture that we advocate.

The good news is that the focus on teaching and learning is becoming greatly advanced by new case studies that are much more precise about the role of collaboration in affecting the pedagogical practice and the efficacy of teachers working together to improve quality and equity in student learning. Much of this work is recent and is based in California (Avelar La Salle & Johnson, 2019; Datnow & Park, 2019; Fullan, 2019; Hargreaves & Fullan, Learning Policy Institute, 2019; Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2012, 2014, 2016). This research captures much more precisely how to achieve success in even the most difficult circumstances.

Let us take two findings from this research. Datnow and Park (2019) in comparing two high poverty schools in California that were successful with two that weren't found that in the successful schools "teachers didn't distinguish between formal and informal collaboration because it all happened so fluidly" (p.52), "that collaboration was sustained and protected from external demands", "that collaboration occurred within and across teams", "that the group strove for continuous innovation improvement" and so on. Similarly Hargreaves and O'Connor (2019) in examining professional learning collaboratives across seven countries concluded that when successful "the joint work of collaborative professionalism is embedded in the culture and life of the schools" (Chapter 8).

We know from our deep learning work that implementing **Recommendation 1: Focus on Deep Learning—Learning is the Work** represents a major undertaking (Fullan, Quinn, & McEachen, 2018; Quinn, McEachen, Fullan, Gardner & Drummy (in press). We are now engaging some districts in California to jointly pursue this work in 2019 and beyond.

We also know from Ontario that changing the teaching profession toward a greater day-to-day 'learning is the work' mode requires enormous, persistent, 'overdetermined' (overlapping) strategies; keep in mind also that California is three times larger than Ontario (see Fullan & Rincón-Gallardo, 2016). It took Ontario ten years to develop a strong degree of implementation concerning teacher individual and collective capacity, and it is still not stable.

In any case, the key points are:

- i. 'Learning is the work' embedded in the daily culture of schools, districts and for that matter the total system is crucial to the system transformation that California aspires to.
- ii. Cultures where learning is the work currently exist in only a minority of schools.
- iii. No matter how great the infrastructure is, 'learning is the work' cannot be 'delivered'.
- iv. If we are serious about system reform, we must fund examples of 'learning is the work', and support such learning.

- v. All of this should be done within and across districts. The unit of change is multiple schools.
- vi. 'Learning is the work' should be nested in any differentiated improvement strategy.
- vii. In essence, we don't think that progress can be made at scale without shifting to a 'learning is the work' mode of development.

One bonus is that maintaining a relentless focus on high quality teaching and learning can also support the much-needed integration of special education and general education in California. It has been demonstrated that emerging pedagogies that are effective to support powerful learning among students with special education needs can be beneficial to all students (see Hargreaves , Braun, 2012).

Successful systems like Ontario and Finland have made inclusion a high priority, and have invested in and developed policies and strategies focused on integrating special education into regular classrooms. To take Ontario as an example, after a few years of Ontario's improvement work in 2004-2006, Ontario was beginning to see significant improvements in student outcomes, all across the province, and among almost every disaggregated student group. But students with special needs were barely improving at all. As a result, the achievement gap for these students was widening. Provincial and district leaders in Ontario concluded that for the most part they did not know yet how to teach special education students effectively in ways to reach them. So, they worked to sort out how to change that.

The government's Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) asked 16 districts to identify 4 or 5 schools (at least) in each of their jurisdictions who were interested in working with them to research, learn about, and implement teaching and learning strategies targeted at successfully moving results for children with special needs (note this approach in effect draws on exemplars of 'learning is the work'). LNS hired researchers to work with them and identify what was happening, intending to produce a report that would be focused on education for children with special needs. LNS worked with districts to implement new practices, and carefully tracked progress. The results showed that they were successful in moving results upward for students with special needs at a rate that was faster than the rest of the system. But they also found that the results for English language learners in these classes improved disproportionately, and even that the gender gap in literacy closed as boys improved more quickly than girls. LNS eventually produced a report titled: "Education for All" and spent the next year rolling out the findings and helping teachers see how it could be used to improve their practice. The following year Ontario had the biggest jump in results they ever had for any year of the reforms.

California commissioned a Task Force on Special Education that reported in 2015. It appears that little was done with the recommendations. There is currently a renewed interest in the state on these recommendations. It may be that a concerted effort on improving special education results could have multiple payoffs.

Centering the work on student learning, special education and more, is likely to appeal to larger sectors of society, including advocacy groups. Once noticed by parents and communities, visible improvements in student attitudes toward and skills for learning can create an environment of optimism and trust in the system. Undisputable better learning outcomes resulting from an intentional focus of all education agencies on substantially improved teacher practice and student learning can produce a virtuous cycle of increased trust, engagement, and commitment to the education agenda on the part of educators and the larger community.

In the next iteration of the California Way, we recommend that work continue on the development of central and intermediate agencies in terms of their framing of the reform with respect to standards,

workforce development, measures of progress, and differentiated assistance. Surrounding this—and given that there is a great deal of emphasis on how state agencies (SBE, CDE, COES, and CCEE) can increase capacity—we recommend that these agencies examine what strategies or theories of action can make teaching and learning, including ‘learning is the work’ central to the reform efforts.

2. STAY THE COURSE

It will be important to take the time to enable the policy changes of the past few years to settle in the K-12 system and make their way into classrooms and schools. Here we discuss what we believe are the most important ways to stay the course at the policy level.

- A. *Prioritize Early-Childhood Education and Integrating Education Services.* Many of the state, county and district leaders we talked to were hoping that the new administration would place its focus on early childhood education, thus allowing the K-12 system the time for LCFF and related policies to settle in and become the new way of operating across California’s school system. As it turns out, Governor Newsom is a strong advocate of early learning and has already advocated almost two billion dollars to support development and learning of the 0-5 age group and to plan for further comprehensive system changes that integrate education services all the way from early learning to secondary education.
- It will be important to take the time to enable the policy changes of the past few years to settle in the K-12 system and make their way into classrooms and schools.***
- B. *Increase funding strategically.* The State of California is among the ten largest economies in the world, and yet its per-pupil expenditure is way below the national average. In contrast, its prison system is among the best funded in the nation—while the average cost to imprison someone in the US is about \$30,000 (Mai & Subramanian, 2017), the average cost per-prisoner in California is about \$75,000 (Nichols, 2017). Compare this to the average per-student cost in California of under \$17,000. While the details on how to significantly increase funding for public education might be intricate, we believe a strong coalition advocating for education funding as the most important investment for the future of Californians can make this happen.

It is often the case that, in education systems that have been chronically underfunded, increased funding results in better outcomes almost right away. But this only works up to a point. Money alone does not move education systems from functioning adequately to providing world-class education. If substantial increases in base funding are secured, it will be crucial to direct as much of that funding as possible towards the development of the capacity of counties, districts, and schools to improve and deepen student learning. Smart investment, built upon a growing body of knowledge and a strengthening commitment by all parties to collaborate to learn the way forward together, can fundamentally change the lives of California’s children and youth.

- C. *Keep and strengthen the focus on equity, student learning and wellbeing.* Accountability should play itself out in highly specific transparent, and non-punitive ways leveraging all six recommendations.
- D. *Continue and deepen the tight coordination and communication between the key agencies on which LCFF and its associated policies rely.* These include: the Governor, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the California Department of Education, the State Board of Education, and the key agencies representing teachers, school leaders, district administrators, and counties. Having all these

agencies on the same page for sustained and cumulative work is crucial. Large-scale successful system-wide change (Ontario, Canada being a prime example) takes at least a decade of sustained attention doing and building on the right things.

- E. *Support the development of effective collaboration and partnerships between districts and unions.* It stands to reason and there is growing evidence that the quality of labor-management relationships and the nature of the interaction between them is related to student outcomes, teachers' commitment, and the existence and quality of professional collaboration in schools. (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017). The California Labor-Management Initiative <http://cdefoundation.org/cde_programs/clmi/> has already begun to break new ground in this respect. This project seeks to engage school system unions and management as collaborative partners in creating, resourcing and implementing solutions to strengthen districts so that they more effectively serve students in California.

3. BUILD COHERENCE ON A DAILY BASIS

As noted earlier, we define system coherence as the shared depth of understanding about the nature of the work (Fullan & Quinn, 2015). A coherent system is one where the overall direction and strategy of the system are clear in the minds and hearts of most people working in it. You have coherence when practically any practitioner can explain, without having to prepare an answer in advance, how their everyday work links

One should always strive to make the overall reform comprehensible, but this will not be enough. Leaders (formal and informal) at all levels should make coherence-making a daily preoccupation.

to and contributes to the larger strategy and direction of the system (we call this 'talk the walk'). System change is inherently complex, and we have seen that California's reforms generate complicatedness on a continuous basis. One should always strive to make the overall reform comprehensible, but this will not be enough. Beyond that, as we said in the introduction, leaders (formal and informal) at all levels should make

coherence-making a daily preoccupation. Coherence-making is a full-time job because: a) system change is complex; b) people come and go in their positions; c) the environment (policies, technology, demographics) change; and d) hopefully people have new and better ideas as they go.

It should be obvious that recommendation one—learning is the work—is a strong 'coherence-maker'. Coherence is an emotional, experiential, personal and above all a collective phenomenon. Leaders then must participate as learners in the change process, 'talk the walk' as they articulate and test emerging clarity, and they must especially

give people opportunity for purposeful interaction, and ongoing assessment of emerging outcomes. Instead of 'rationally' trying to figure out the structure and all of its pieces (although there should be some of that) people need to build coherence through purposeful interaction within and across levels in relation to core goals directly linked to enhanced teaching and deeper student learning. It is precisely these kinds of specific processes that effective schools and districts develop inside their cultures.

The notion that coherence needs to occur on the receiving end (districts and schools) more so than on the delivery end (policy documents and intermediary agencies) needs to be embedded into state level coherence-making processes.

At the state level, coherence-making requires the creation of processes that embed into the culture of the State Board of Education and the California Department of Education the notion that coherence needs to occur on the receiving end (districts and schools) much more so than on the delivery end (in policy

documents and intermediary agencies). This requires more thoughtful strategic planning and intentional de-cluttering than has been the case so far. Every time a major request will be presented to a district, it should be possible to take the time to consider the implications of the request for the district team, and to plan the rollout of the request accordingly.

It should also be possible to enhance coordination and communication between units/offices so that all those state and federal requests that are likely to be presented to districts can be integrated into a single set, and timed in a way that supports the strategic planning of districts, rather than derail their efforts to maintain focus.

Deliberate attention to de-cluttering is another fundamental aspect of building coherence. We recommend that the SBE create a running list of the nature and timing of the state and federal requests being placed on districts, and to designed thoughtfully rollout strategies to minimize clutter.

4. DEVELOP AND LEVERAGE THE EXPERTISE OF SCHOOLS, DISTRICTS, COUNTIES, AND SUPPORT PROVIDERS

Highly specific knowledge is being developed, especially in California, about how schools and districts improve. High performing and continuously improving districts, as a whole representing a wide spectrum in terms of size, context, composition of the communities and students they serve, etc., represent an untapped source of expertise when it comes to developing capacity for continuous improvement across California.

The impact of this new and more focused knowledge can be expanded in two ways. First, make a concerted effort to promulgate these practice-based findings. The Learning Policy Institute is doing some of this, but the findings can also be distilled and disseminated through action-based formats across the state including for example being featured by and with the Geo Leads, the CDE, and the CCEE.

High performing and continuously improving districts represent an untapped source of expertise when it comes to developing capacity for continuous improvement across California.

Second, develop a strategy to increase the visibility and spread the influence of districts and schools with a track record of high performance and continued improvement in specific key outcomes (e.g., districts identified as positive outliers). For each key outcome it is important to identify leading districts and schools that represent a wide range in size, the contexts where they operate (rural/suburban/urban), and the students and communities they serve (socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, English learner status). The strategy could include the creation of short videos highlighting the history, the strategy and the achievement of these Local Education Agencies, as well as the development of learning networks and school visits that allow other districts and schools to learn from their peers.

An important criterion to identify districts and schools on the move is the ability of their leaders to articulate what they've done to produce their improved outcomes and why it's working. These districts and schools can serve as a key resource for the Statewide System of Support to be put in the service of districts, counties and schools looking for peers operating in similar circumstances and serving similar students who have managed to achieve greater performance than would be expected given the demographic characteristics of the students and communities they serve.

Third, create an integrated and aligned data system. Getting Down to Facts II (Hough, Byun & Mulfinger, 2018; Phillips, Reber & Rothstein, 2018) has highlighted the importance of making the CALPADs data system easier to access and use, and integrating it with data systems from other key sectors—pre-school, higher education, social services. Governor Newsom's 2019-2020 budget includes \$10M to plan for an

integrated data system. This is a very important step towards enhancing the type and quality of data available to identify districts and schools against multiple contextual and performance measures.

Fourth, facilitate partnerships between districts to focus on addressing specific challenges faced in common. Each year Dashboard results will be released, and a number of districts will be identified for differentiated assistance in a number of different priority areas. Yet a district that pursues deep change in too many areas and goals is unlikely to achieve successful improvement in any of them. In the recently launched Statewide System of Support, counties work with districts to prioritize their focus on their students' areas of greatest need. Once a picture emerges of the key area(s) where assistance is needed, districts that share common areas of improvement should be able to develop a 3-year commitment to the area in need of assistance and stick to it. Similarly, on the positive side districts that achieve positive results three year running should be identified and their work showcased to help other districts learn from them.

The good news is as teachers and school and district leaders learn new and more successful strategies in one area of priority and as they change their daily work with students to accelerate learning, other areas are highly likely to improve as well. The plan itself consists of implementation of an expanding collaborative learning network among districts and their schools. As districts become involved in the improvement work, they may wish to develop similar networking strategies to support deep changes in teaching and learning in their schools. Three conditions should be non-negotiable:

- 1) The strategies will have to develop effective pedagogies for all students (perhaps with an initial emphasis on a specific student group, but with the deliberate intention of reaching everyone);
- 2) The network should intentionally identify ways in which this specific focus and the network approach to change can be leveraged in the service of better performance for all students and greater coherence across each district, and
- 3) These networks should be supported by the work of relevant counties, other state agencies and their partnerships, that is, these collaborative networks should be seen as nested within the existing structures and their requirements, not additional workloads for the districts involved.

If California is going to accelerate the learning and close achievement gaps for various groups of students, a robust strategy to leverage and spread the learning is needed. Some of this spread will come about as a direct result of networks working intensively with state support, but over time it should increasingly also result from districts leading their own way forward, taking advantage of the learning built by districts leading the way.

There is an important role to be played here by CDE. As networks of districts needing support work together in their areas of greatest need for a minimum of three years, one would expect that there will be various groupings working with a focus on specific groups of students (for example, some in helping students with disabilities close the gap, others in supporting English learners, Hispanic students, and so on). The state should be coordinating the work on each team to produce high quality, practical and action-oriented research that tracks the improvement journey and successful strategies and pedagogies. The state should also develop a plan to publish the results of this learning in a series of practical monographs with other districts (both their leaders and educators) across the state as the key audience. If California is going to accelerate the learning and close achievement gaps for various groups of students, a robust strategy to leverage and spread the learning is needed. Some of this spread will come about as a direct result of networks working intensively with state support, but over time it should increasingly also result from districts leading their own way forward, taking advantage of the learning built by districts leading the way.

The County Leads strategy is yet another key initiative that will require significant effort, not only on the part of County Leads themselves, but also CCEE and CDE. The strategy is in its very early stages, and the key to success lies in maintaining constant and focused interaction and collaboration among County Leads, transparency of results, and well-established cycles of continuous improvement; as well as on strategic support, coaching and feedback on the part of the multi-agency working group that has been developing the Statewide System of Support.

Finally, there is a wide range of external support providers across California, and the state should identify those with a track record of success on developing the capacity of districts to improve their performance (earlier in this report we have offered a set of criteria that could be used to identify effective support providers). Creating a living repository with a curated list of effective support providers and making it available to districts, as well as developing incentives for support providers across the state to embed key identified principles of effective external support into their own work, can make an important contribution to building capacity for continuous improvement across the state.

5. CULTIVATE TRUST AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY WITH COMMUNITIES AND ADVOCACY GROUPS

As we said earlier, one of the difficulties—and greatest opportunities—for California's education sector is that it needs to cultivate relationships with multiple stakeholders just to get things running. While this requires tremendous effort, once an overarching direction is agreed upon, it can also create a broad and deep base of support that can ensure the sustainability and depth of impact of the reform strategy. There are signs of impatience among some advocacy groups with the slow progress that California is making on closing opportunity and achievement gaps. One of the most recent signs is the decision of the legislature to conduct an audit on LCFF spending to assess whether and to what extent districts are using the money intended to support English learners, students in poverty, and foster youth the way they're supposed to according to their LCAP. Our worry is that this might place too much attention on counting expenditures rather than on the progress achieved so far, and might result in a strong return to categorical funding (an approach that, for decades, was in place in California and failed to produce its intended results). It might be the case that districts are using portions of their supplemental and concentration funds to compensate for other key district needs, a trend that would make sense given what is known now about the inadequacy of base funding for districts in California (Imazeki et al, 2018). But we worry that the resulting tensions and confrontation between districts and advocacy groups might consume a lot of the energy and effort that could be better placed on a proactive (rather than a confrontational) agenda centered around better and deeper learning for all students.

Building trust between the education sector and advocacy groups involves furthering the depth and breath of community participation in the LCAP process. Family engagement, especially in the case of under-represented families, represents one of the key challenges

identified by district superintendents in the LCAP process (Marsh & Koppich, 2018). There is already important expertise and capacity for deep community engagement in some districts and counties, and the creation of a Community Engagement Lead is an important step in furthering trust and partnership between communities and districts. But improving the extent and depth of families and communities into the local budgeting and planning process is, in our view, only a first step in cultivating trust across the system.

More robust trust between districts and advocacy groups should be cultivated through the development of processes of continuous community engagement that extend beyond the budgeting and planning process required to create the LCAP.

More robust trust between districts and advocacy groups should be cultivated through the development of processes of continuous community engagement that extend beyond the budgeting and planning process required to create the LCAP. This could involve the creation of partnerships with multiple agencies to alleviate some of the out-of-school conditions that most affect student engagement (the San Diego Unified School district has developed expertise in creating this type of partnerships), but also links with universities, workplaces and public offices to provide students with access to opportunities to learn directly from experts in the fields that they're interested in exploring (Linked Learning is an example of these type of partnerships).

More constant and intentional interaction between districts and advocacy groups should also be oriented towards each part getting to understand the needs and hopes of the other more deeply. On the one hand, districts can gain a deeper understanding of the concerns guiding the actions of advocacy groups, whereas advocacy groups could gain exposure to some of the best examples of the right drivers in action—and the damaging and unintended consequences of using the wrong drivers.

6. CONTINUE TO CLARIFY THE ROLE OF AND ENHANCE INTERACTION AMONG COUNTIES, CCEE, AND CDE IN A LEARNING-BY-DOING FASHION

There has been an increasing degree of collaboration and communication among the State Board of Education, the California Department of Education, the CCEE, and CCSESA over the past few years. The inter-agency collaboration that has emerged from efforts to rollout LCAP, to develop and refine the Dashboard, and more recently to develop the Statewide System of Support was highlighted by many of the people we talked to as prominent examples of the type of collaboration that is making California's education system stronger. This type of learning-by doing collaboration has to continue. While working together, all agencies have to be alert to, call out, and avoid attempts to slip back into compliance and unilateral decision-making.

The type of learning-by-doing inter-agency collaboration that has emerged over the past few years has to continue. While working together, all agencies have to be alert to, callout, and avoid attempts to slip back into compliance and unilateral decision-making.

Defining the future role of CCEE is a very important pending task. CCEE has done a lot, especially considering its short life and its small staff. But how exactly all this work adds up, gets refined and results in a better, more effective education system in California is yet to be determined. Identifying the most impactful, strategic role for CCEE remains a critical area of development. Throughout this report, we have presented some ideas of key tasks that might help accelerate capacity building and improvement across the system, and that we believe can be considered as part of CCEE's new role. Some possible key strategic areas for CCEE's role—some of which this agency is already taking some steps to realize include: providing high-quality coaching to County Leads as they design and roll out their strategies to build the capacity of their peer counties to effectively support districts; mapping out and leveraging existing school, district, and county capacity/expertise across the state; supporting the development of a system-wide strategy centered around deeper student learning; articulating and continuously developing a working understanding of how people in the system can learn to do their work differently to fundamentally improve teaching and learning; capturing lessons from the work and communicating them back to the system in the form of key principles of action for effective collaboration between districts, effective county support to districts, effective lateral capacity building between counties, and effective inter-agency collaboration; and contracting and curating the production of monographs and action oriented communication pieces that can inform district work moving forward.

CONCLUSION

There are a number of specific, prominent themes that we have not delved into. These include:

- a) Teacher shortage (Darling-Hammond, Sutchter, & Carver-Thomas, 2018);
- b) Need for high quality early childhood education (Stipek, 2018);
- c) English learners (Umanski, 2018);
- d) Regulation of charter schools (Slungaard Mumma, & West, 2018);
- e) Student well-being (Reback, 2018), especially merging well being and academic learning into a whole-child framework; and
- f) Professional learning pathways for school and system leaders (Sutchter, Podolosky, Kini, & Shields, 2018).

Also, we have not sufficiently engaged with or given proper consideration to certain other key groups such as CTA, ACSA, and Parent and Advocacy groups.

It is worthwhile noting our conclusions in relation to those of the Learning Policy Institute's assessment: *The California Way: The Golden State's Quest to Build an Equitable and Excellent Education System* (Furger, Hernandez, & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Essentially, as is evident in the nature and language of LPI's analysis and recommendations, the two sets of recommendations are compatible and mutually reinforcing. LPI makes 12 recommendations organized into three domains:

- 1. Funding: Support LCFF fundamentals and strategic educational investments;
- 2. Capacity building: Strengthen the capacity of districts, schools, and educators to address the state's priority areas;
- 3. Staffing: Strengthen the educator workforce.

The two sets of recommendations—LPI's and ours—are mutually reinforcing and highlight how much work remains to be done. Our main overall point remains for the state as a whole. So far, the efforts are more promise than realization. They are not sufficiently developed or widespread to make a substantial difference across the state. They are much more about getting ready than about fundamentally transforming teaching and learning

in classrooms and schools. The next phase—2019 and beyond—could be a watershed period for California where the payoff of the development of the past six years could be leveraged to yield substantial benefits in a relatively short period of time. We believe that placing deeper learning at the center of the work of all key agencies is likely to galvanize support and deepen engagement from multiple stakeholders and to unleash tremendous energy that remains untapped across the entire system. This work has to be accompanied by the combination of the following: the nature and taste of success, the knowledge base, the growing number of committed change agents, new leadership at the top, the urgent need to address inequity, and the way in which a large system can demonstrate how substantial progress can be achieved for all.

We believe that placing deeper learning at the center of the work of all key agencies is likely to galvanize support and deepen engagement from multiple stakeholders and to unleash tremendous energy that remains untapped across the entire system.

In effect, our recommendations say: 'stay the course but change the execution' with a special focus on "Learning is the Work". As the African proverb goes: "If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together". After six years of laying much of the groundwork it is time to go far *and* fast. It is time to focus on deeper student learning, pick up the pace, and go together.

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Finally, we want to say that it is a great privilege for us to work across the state in such a sustained way. We thank all Californians for our close working relationships.

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Glossary of Acronyms

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| <i>ACSA</i> | Association of California Superintendents and Administrators |
| <i>ATSI</i> | Additional Targeted Support and Improvement |
| <i>CALPADS</i> | California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System |
| <i>CCEE</i> | California Collaborative for Educational Excellence |
| <i>CCSESA</i> | California County Superintendents Educational Services Association |
| <i>CDE</i> | California Department of Education |
| <i>COE</i> | County Office of Education |
| <i>CTA</i> | California Teachers Association |
| <i>CTEIG</i> | Career and Technical Education Incentive Grant |
| <i>ESSA</i> | Every Student Succeeds Act |
| <i>LCAP</i> | Local Control and Accountability Plan |
| <i>LCFF</i> | Local Control Funding Formula |
| <i>LEA</i> | Local Education Agency |
| <i>LNS</i> | Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat |
| <i>LPI</i> | Learning Policy Institute |
| <i>PACE</i> | Policy Analysis for California Education |
| <i>PIR</i> | Performance Indicator Review |
| <i>SBE</i> | State Board of Education |
| <i>SELPA</i> | Special Education Local Planning Area |
| <i>SSPI</i> | State Superintendent of Public Instruction |